

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL RICK HALL, COMMANDER,
SECOND BATTALION/SEVENTH MARINES, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN TIME:
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (New Media Directorate, Office of the
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Hello, everyone. I'd like
to welcome you to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Friday,
May 16th.

My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary
of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating our call today.

A note to all the bloggers on the call today, please remember to
clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question.
Respect our guest's time, keeping questions succinct and to the point.

Of course today our guest is from Afghanistan, and is Lieutenant
Colonel Richard Hall, battalion commander, Second Battalion, Seventh Marine
Regiment, 1st Marine Division. Hall is here to provide an operational
update. And of course we are pleased to have you as guests.

So with that, sir, I'll turn it over to you.

COL. HALL: Okay, having never done one of these before, I guess I'm
just available to answer any and all questions.

LT. CRAGG: If you have an opening statement, sir, you can go ahead, or
we can just proceed with the questions.

COL. HALL: Okay, I can start with an opening statement. And let's
start with this, that we are very motivated by the mission that we've been
assigned. And the reasons why we're so excited about the reason why we're here
is because everything that we do, everywhere we go, we are going to make a
positive difference.

What's unique about our mission is that we are doing a police training
and mentoring mission as opposed to coming in here kinetically like a lot of our
past exploits have been, especially in Iraq, and what 24 MEU's currently doing
down in South Helmand.

So the things that we're focusing on is the people -- (audio break) --
Helmand. So what we can do is enhance the training and the respectability of

the police, and working the civil-military operations in each of the villages that we go to to improve prosperity.

So everywhere we go we're looking at a positive atmosphere. So that's what makes it pretty exciting to be here because the people want us here and we want to be here because that is our mission, the people.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Is that all?

COL. HALL: Sure, I can answer any questions, or I could rattle on all day.

LT. CRAGG: Roger that. Let's turn it over to the first blogger on the line. It's Professor Andrew Lubin. Andrew, if you want to go ahead with the first question.

Q Sir, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin for the Military Observer. First of all, thanks for taking the time to speak with us this evening.

COL. HALL: My pleasure.

Q Sir, could you talk to, since you are a different mission than 24 MEU and a lot of these Marines probably haven't spent combat tours in Iraq, can you talk to us a bit about the training -- the difference in training they got before you all came over? COL. HALL: That's a great question. I feel that not only is the Marine Corps the right force to be doing this based on our history of doing the small force and the success that we've had in places like Al Anbar and so forth, we also -- our battalion, 27, has been trained in some very specific areas. And the first of those is a kind of a new program that the Marine Corps is just starting, and it's called Train the Trainer. (Technical difficulties) -- until they've actually met a standard, and they are able to teach it. Everything that they -- (technical difficulties) -- they are competent and confident in what they are teaching.

So first of all, as an instructor -- (technical difficulties) -- kind of training -- (technical difficulties) -- our team leader, which is -- he's in charge of four Marines. So that's pretty far down, but we have competent and confident instructors.

The second piece is that we went through a one-month-long training final exercise called Mojave Viper. (Technical difficulties) -- new Mojave Viper just for 27 that was specifically designed for the type of mission that we are here for. The -- (technical difficulties) -- as well as we spent quite a bit of time focusing on escalation of force vignettes. And what that does is it -- (technical difficulties) -- mind-set of the Marines to -- (technical difficulties) -- more of a police view -- you know, civil view -- as opposed to a very kinetic view.

So combining all those together, 27 is definitely the right -- (technical difficulties) -- to be here right now.

Q Great, thanks. Quick follow up: Based on everybody's experience in Iraq, do you have enough terps?

COL. HALL: Hello, is anybody still there? Or did we lose the net?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, sir. No, no, no, we're still here.

Q We're still on.

LT. CRAGG: There's just a delay. Go ahead, Andrew, ask your second part question.

Q Yes, sir. Do you base everybody's experience the first couple years in Iraq and most of my --

COL. HALL: I'm not sure if you can hear me, but just so you know, I cannot hear anybody on that end.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Everyone on the call, I'm going to go ahead and quickly e-mail him, e-mail his staff, just to see if -- hang on just a second -- if he can call back, okay.

COL. HALL: I think we've lost the connection. Q I'll hold.

LT. CRAGG: Hold, everyone.

(Interruption to fix technical difficulties.)

LT. CRAGG: Andrew had a follow-up question.

COL. HALL: Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Andrew.

Q Yes, sir, do you have enough terps?

COL. HALL: I'm sorry, say again, please?

Q Do you enough terps for what you're doing? I mean, communication is really important when you're down to fire-team levels. Can you get the word out?

COL. HALL: Oh, great question. We've actually -- we're getting plussed up more than we originally asked for. So in that department we're doing pretty well.

Q Great, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, we'll go with the second caller. It was Troy. Troy, go on with your question.

Q Okay. Hello, sir, this is Troy Steward from Bouhammer.com.

COL. HALL: Okay.

Q First question is, my initial one is, are you mentoring, are your people mentoring and training the police on specific police tasks yet? Or are they still focusing on proper conduct, improving the view of the ANP by the public and logistic issues and planning and training and things along that line?

COL. HALL: Actually, we're doing all those things that you mentioned. And one of the things that we're really going to focus on, yes, we are going to really do the quantifiable training of improving their police skills. We

actually have a couple of embedded law enforcement reps who are law enforcement -- they have law enforcement experience.

We also have DynCorp and some National Guardsmen who all have police experience, mostly our New York City police. They will be assisting us in all -- (technical difficulties) -- character development piece because I think that is the real enduring piece that we have to inculcate in our recruits in these new police that we're going to be mentoring. In other words, doing the right thing when no one is looking. And the reason for that is whether or not we get replaced or not, we need to teach a man to fish so that they could be self-sufficient with or without our presence. And they need to have the credibility and the respectability of their people in order to maintain that law and order presence even if we're absent. I'm hoping that answers your question.

Q Yes, sir, it does. And one quick follow-up to go with that.

The ANCOPs are a big piece of that that were just recently introduced, I think, in the last six or eight months, you know, as you know, to replace the police -- district police so they can go to the academies. Have all the -- pretty much a majority or a percentage of the different district police in your area of operation been to the academies? Have the ANCOPs been in there replacing them while they go off and get the training? Or is that still ongoing in your area?

COL. HALL: We have a whole -- (technical difficulties) -- cycles going on in all of our districts. Some of the districts we will have ANCOP, so not only will we continue to support them and even mentor them -- (technical difficulties) -- 100 percent finished product either, but they are very good. But we will enhance the security that they provide just as we would in any of the districts along with any cycle of police training.

We also have those that are preparing to go into the focused district development training. We'll have those that have already gone through it, and we're in the overwatch phase of that. And we also have a thing called in-district reform, which you may or may not be familiar with, and in a couple of our districts, we'll be doing that, which is kind of a half and half methodology of the force district development. And the reason for that is we just don't have enough ANCOP to go around. So that is kind of the way that we can fast track getting more of these districts, get their police trained.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Next person on the line was Grim. Go ahead with your question, Grim.

Q Yes, sir, this is Grim with Blackfive.net. Sir, I am informed by some of our military charity members that they had received a -- an e-mail from a two-seven Marine asking for care packages on the grounds that he wasn't getting everything he needed through regular supply chains. Is that accurate? Is there anything that you need from us that we can assist you with? Or is that not the case? COL. HALL: I didn't catch the last part of your question. I understand that a Marine e-mailed somebody and said that there is some gear or equipment that we didn't have to do the mission, what specifically -- (inaudible)?

Q I am not certain. I just wanted to check with you to see if there is anything that you would need from us. We do occasionally assist units in the field with whatever they might be having trouble getting.

COL. HALL: I'm not sure what you would provide. I wasn't really able to catch what service that is. But right now in order to do our mission we quite frankly don't know what we don't have yet until we actually start going through it. We think we have everything we need so far, what we thought of. But I guess truth will be in execution when we actually get out -- (technical difficulties) -- and maybe we'll find out we need something more to train.

But I will say the ANP themselves, they are lacking equipment. And we've been engaging the regional, provisional and district chiefs to -- and as well as the provincial governors -- to support us and properly equipping these police because we feel that a properly equipped and trained police is going to gain the respectability of their constituency, which is an extension of the government. So that's what we're hoping for.

Q What kind of things do the ANP require that they do not have?

COL. HALL: The -- (technical difficulties) -- it's very simple things like concertina wire to uniform items. In the wintertime it's gloves, socks and boots. And weapons and ammunition, or fuel for their vehicles. But once we get on the ground and we are able to do our assessments at each one of these districts, we are going to go through the logistics channels, which we think we have a fairly good handle on, and try to rectify that.

The problems why they had existed is because it's been somewhat of a corrupt system. And it's our aim to go in there and get it squared away. And we have of course the chief of police, their support. But it's actually implementing it down to the troop level and ensuring that they are not doing -- taking from the police at the higher levels. Mostly it's the pay piece, but I think we are getting past that now. And certainly with our presence there we are going to fix it.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: The next person on the line was David.

COL. HALL: Welcome.

LT. CRAGG: Your question. Q Hi, it's David from War is Boring. Speaking of equipment, are you planning on using any biometric systems either for vetting police or for law enforcement tasks?

COL. HALL: I think I understand your question. The connection here is pretty weak. But are you asking about biometrics?

Q Yes.

COL. HALL: Okay. The answer to your question is yes. And -- (technical difficulties) -- is because some of the proper credentialing of these police has been a problem.

You know, who really rates to be paid? And so if there is a system that is lacking, which we believe there is, you know, at least we'll be able to do it and get them properly badged, so only those who are trained and legitimate

police -- (technical difficulties) -- we know there are some shadow police and some militia-type police that are actually drawing a paycheck that shouldn't.

So it's our hope that once we go through the vetting process we'll have everybody screened and properly badged so that problem should go away. And then we'll turn all that information over to the Afghan system, or integrate it with them if possible, so that should we leave they have everything that we have.

Q A quick follow up, do you know which biometrics you might use? Is it fingerprints? Or is it fingerprints and something else?

COL. HALL: I'm not -- you came in broken, but I think I understand you to say is the system fingerprints or something else?

Q Yes.

COL. HALL: Is that correct?

Q Yes.

COL. HALL: Yes, it's both eyescan and -- (technical difficulties).

LT. CRAGG: Could everyone hear that?

Q Yes. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Next person on the line was Jared. If you are still there, Jared, your question?

(Pause.)

LT. CRAGG: Jared might have dropped the line. Does anybody have any follow-on questions?

Q Yeah, I do. LT. CRAGG: Okay, go ahead.

Q Colonel, Andrew Lubin again.

How do you teach non-corruption? How do you teach being a good citizen to an Afghan who's got nothing but, you know -- but a society that is less than Western -- and then do this in a Marine deployment?

COL. HALL: There's a couple of ways, and quite frankly, first of all, that is a great question because it's uncharted territory. (Technical difficulties.) We have experience of transformation in our boot camps, and we've been pretty successful in doing that. And I've often said that Marines have infectious personalities.

So I think just by our presence and our actions they're going to -- (technical difficulties) -- the line, you know, on us, because we're both of a warrior culture, both the Marines and the Afghans. So I think they're going to be like us -- (technical difficulties) -- experiencing how we do business. And so with our ability to kind of teaching by doing, and using the Pashtun Wali code to enhance their view of what we're doing and tying it together, I think that's going to be a means to do that character development.

Q Great, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Someone joined us.

COL. HALL: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: Welcome, who joined us? Okay, if anyone has any more follow on questions, we have at least about seven more minutes.

Q Yes, this is Troy, I got one.

LT. CRAGG: Go ahead, Troy.

Q Colonel, this is Troy Steward again.

In my tour that ended last year, I was a PMT mentor at the provincial level at the first three months of the Task Force Phoenix, took it over. One of the issues we had at that point -- of course, we'd just taken the mission -- was trying to grasp or get our hands around everything that needed to be done, especially at the province level -- investigations, detainee ops, all those different aspects which are -- you know, had to be dealt with there that the districts don't deal with a lot.

Have you seen that that has progressed since January of '07? And have you -- is there kind of a plan or do you have an operational overview of what that's going to take to address all those areas of police mentorship? COL. HALL: You know, I wish I had an answer to that. But I'm only too new to this operation to be able to really speak intelligently about that. I know we have thought about it and have discussed means to hopefully effect some changes that we see as gaps. And one of them you touched on, is that although we can do -- (technical difficulties) -- some law enforcement -- not so much us, but in concert with the ANP -- but once we get detainees, it's what do we do with them when there isn't a well-developed judicial system?

So that's something that concerns us, and that we're going to be trying to work during our deployment here. But at our level I'm not sure how effective we're going to be. But the rest of your questions I really can't answer because I just don't know enough about it.

Q All right. Thank you, sir, I appreciate it.

COL. HALL: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: We have some more time for follow-on questions.

Q Absolutely. Colonel, Andrew Lubin again.

The Pashtun-Wali code, could you go into a bit of detail about that? That'd be fascinating to hear about.

COL. HALL: Well, really, you know, I can sum it up in one word: honor. And you know, we have a code of honor. And that's a facet of Pashtun-Wali that resonates with our area of Afghanistan, anyway, is that honor code. And so I think that we need to -- (technical difficulties) -- about, you know, doing the right thing -- (technical difficulties). When we are working right alongside them, doing exactly the same thing that they're doing, experiencing the same dangers and so forth, we're going to gain respectability from our mates and our peers, our Afghan peers. And I think that once we start working together,

they're going to -- we're going to have that shared -- (technical difficulties) -- and you know, I really -- I talk to the Marines about it quite a bit, about that these are our brothers in arms, you know, of trying to maintain security and prosperity in our villages, just as we would want to do in our own hometowns.

So when you look at it in terms like that, and the Afghans that we're going to be alongside, I think they're going to -- they're going to catch the sense that we're really sincere about our mission and what we're trying to do and they're going to make no distinction between us and them. And I think that's really going to add to the character piece because they absolutely do respect that of other men, you know, sharing the danger and so forth. And -- (technical difficulties) -- of honor despite potential for selfish gain. We're hoping that that's going to run off.

But you're right; they've been doing this for a long time. It's in their tribal system. We make no illusions that are going to fix it all in a few short months. Q Well, that seems to work with the ANAs. I was over there last year, in Camp Black Horse and out in the east, ANAs and Marines, boy, that could not have been a better group.

But is this working from the ANAs to the ANPs? Are the ANPs picking this up?

COL. HALL: Yeah, you're right, it does work with the ANA, and that we are hoping to try to translate that same effect down to the ANP. And as you know, we make no -- we don't -- we don't pretend that it's not going to be a huge challenge, and especially when we've seen some of the type of recruits that we're going to be working with.

But we have had influence and effect before, and I think that the successes that we had in Al Anbar in Iraq with a(n) idealistic type of people -- I should say a religiously idealistic people -- here, you know, I think we're going to share that pragmatic view of a sense, you know, of courage and honor and those type of things. I think we're going to have a much different relationship than we ever did with our Iraqis.

But -- (technical difficulties) -- the truth will be in action when we actually get out there and we give it a try, and we can only hope that everything I've said comes true.

Q Great.

LT. CRAGG: That wraps up the call for today. And I want to say thank you for everyone and thank you for calling back. We had some great questions and some great answers today. As we wrap up today's call, though, sir, is there any last final words that you want to say to the group?

COL. HALL: Well, first of all, I thank you for the opportunity because this is one of those things that we rarely get an opportunity to do is share the message with the public. And you know, it's always bad stories that get out there. I'd like to focus on a good news story. And I think with our shock trauma platoon that's already gone out there and saved some lives, and we've only been here just a few short weeks. We've already held -- (technical difficulties) -- village leaders -- (technical difficulties) -- expressed a desire to work hand in hand with us against the Taliban and to enhance prosperity in their villages. Those are all very positive -- (technical

difficulties) -- a short time. So we're pretty motivated -- (technical difficulties) -- and sharing the experience with the Afghan people. And that's we're here for. We are here because of them, and I think that's a win-win situation. LT. CRAGG: In the future, perhaps, we can do another operational update, maybe in a month or so.

COL. HALL: That would be good because I'll have a lot more to talk about from experience rather than conjecture.

LT. CRAGG: Yeah, that would be great.

Q Lt. Cragg?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, ma'am, we're finishing up the first one, we'll be just one second. But today's program will be available online at the "bloggers" link at DOD.mil where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call along with the source documents and, of course, the transcript. If you have any questions about the program, please contact the DOD New Media team at 703-325-0103.

And again, thank you, Lieutenant Colonel Hall and all the bloggers on the line.

Q Thanks.

Q Hey, Colonel, thanks for the time.

COL. HALL: Okay, thank you. All right, semper fidelis.

END.